

## Talks on Missile Curbs Draw Skepticism Here

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Russia continues to show interest in discussing arms control issues with the United States, but there is deep skepticism in official circles here that any agreements will emerge from the forthcoming talks on halting the missile race.

President Johnson, at a news conference yesterday, disclosed Premier Alexei N. Kosygin's willingness to have Soviet officials confer with U.S. diplomats on the limitation of both offensive and defensive missiles.

But in the same session at the White House, Johnson acknowledged there had not been "a complete meeting of the minds" on a treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons which is being actively negotiated in Geneva.

In Moscow today, a U.S. spokesman said the talks are expected to begin next week.

### Doubts Created

Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson expects to see Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko to work out just who will negotiate, with whom, and when.

The inability of the big powers to reach an agreement on the nonproliferation treaty has led, in part, to the serious doubts

here on the possibility of arriving at any meaningful consensus on the missile question.

From what Johnson has said before, it is clear that if there is no agreement on missiles, he probably will order a go-ahead in a U.S. defensive system (anti-ballistic missiles) to match the Soviet ABM system now being built.

This, in turn, could lead to a new round in offensive missile making.

Johnson's news conference was called hurriedly and it was clear the President wanted to stress his pleasure over the message he had received from Kosygin in reply to Johnson's letter of Jan. 27.

### Kremlin Willing

"This reply," the President said, "confirmed the willingness of the Soviet government to discuss means of limiting the arms race in offensive and defensive nuclear missiles. This exchange of views is expected to lead to further discussions of this subject in Moscow and with our allies. It is my hope that a means can be found to achieve constructive results."

The meetings are critical, since they will influence the United States decision whether to spend up to \$70 billion on an ABM system, Nike-X.

"Before reaching a final decision on the course this government would follow in connection with a defensive system, I think we would like to explore an agreement," Johnson said.

"In any event, we would like to have some discussions and be sure we couldn't get an agreement before we made a very basic decision that was far-reaching, comprehensive, and one on which we could not turn back," Johnson added.

U.S. officials had raised the matter of a freeze on ABM two months ago, but the Russians said they saw nothing dangerous in a defensive system, and would only discuss a freeze on ABMs if the United States discussed offensive missiles as well. Johnson agreed.

But any agreement regulating missiles would in the end have to have some kind of inspection system to satisfy the United States — and the Russians so far have rejected on-site inspections.

This factor, plus the inability of the big powers to agree on any "hardware" control in the

casts the forthcoming talks in a gloomy light.

This mood is not dissipated by reports from Geneva. About a month ago, many officials in Washington believed the United States and the Soviet Union were so close to agreement on a draft treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons that they predicted a document would be produced by March 1.

But today—March 3—United States and Russia are as far apart as ever on the key issue of whether the treaty would bar in the future a political union of Western Europe from having its own nuclear force.

The United States, partly to meet West German desires, has said that it would not agree to a treaty that rules out such an all-European force, because to do so would, in effect, rule out forever the political union of Europe.

The Russians see this as a loophole to give Germany nuclear weapons at some future date, and refuse to agree.

There are other matters blocking agreement, such as how to verify that industrial atomic reactors are not being used to make weapon components, as well as a host of problems raised by the non-nuclear powers.

But these questions center around the obvious one: Why should a government agree not ever to make nuclear weapons? Why should it give up this right when five other countries already have nuclear weapons and will continue to have them?

Sweden, Italy, India, and Japan, among others, have said they were not interested in a treaty unless there would be a pledge from Russia and America to protect them against nuclear blackmail and unless Russia and America agree to begin the process of reducing their own arms cache.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union say these matters are peripheral to a treaty, and should be discussed after one is concluded.